

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 818

CE 023 691

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 TITLE Toward a Dialectical Conception of Career Development: An Exploratory Study.
 INSTITUTION Rochester Univ., N.Y.
 PUB DATE [77]
 NOTE 50p-
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Behavior Theories; Career Choice; *Career Development; Career Education; Case Studies; Conflict Resolution; Coping; Decision Making; *Economic Factors; Educational Background; Employment Qualifications; Environmental Influences; Individual Development; Individual Needs; Interaction; Job Satisfaction; Occupational Choice; *Physiology; Problem Solving; *Psychological Needs; Research Needs; *Social Factors

ABSTRACT

A dialectical conception of career development focuses on self and environmental interactions involving four dimensions: physical, physiological, psychological, sociological, and economic. When individuals perceive the relationships among experiences in these dimensions as synchronous (complementary), they experience relative stability in their work and job satisfaction. When the relationships are perceived as asynchronous (contradictory), individuals encounter cognitive or behavioral discontinuity and job dissatisfaction. Discontinuity may intensify into conflict (moderate level of discomfort) or crisis (high level of discomfort). Compromising eliminates or reduces the original discontinuity. The continuing resolution of conflicts and crises leads to growth. Interviews with fourteen adult respondents were structured to give data relevant to certain content objectives: (1) educational-vocational background, (2) factors influencing current occupational choice, (3) self and environmental parameters of current job, (4) sources of job satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and (5) resolution of discontinuities. Four respondents identified no personally significant discontinuity, seven identified one discontinuity with no conflict or crisis, and three identified one or more discontinuities and revealed some aspects of conflict. Findings challenge the universality of the outlined dialectical process, suggest a broader conception of conflict, and hint at discontinuities generating varying degrees of conflict. (Results are also represented in tables and figures.) (YLB)

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Toward a Dialectical Conception of Career Development:

An Exploratory Study

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Suggested running head: Career Dialectics

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Abstract

This paper addresses some theoretical and research issues central to understanding the individualistic nature of career evolution and career growth. It proposes a dialectical conception of career development emphasizing the dynamic and interactive quality of self and environment throughout one's working life, and reports the results of an exploratory study in which 14 adults responded to an interview developed to research the dialectical process. Relationships among variables suggested in theory are identified and described in capsule sketches. Substantive questions for further research of career dialectics are enumerated.

Key Words

Career development

Dialectical process

Self changes

Environmental changes

Discontinuity

Conflict

Toward a Dialectical Conception of Career Development:
An Exploratory Study

Contemporary thinking about career development is dominated by two psychological perspectives: the trait-factor or differentialist view (Holland, 1973; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969; Williamson, 1972) and the developmental view (Crites, 1969; Super, 1969). Both theoretical forms rely heavily on the congruity between attributes of the person and attributes of the job to account for occupational choices, work adjustment, and career patterning. Neither seems to sufficiently attend to the diverse range of environmental opportunities and constraints that influence evolving careers. For example, Super's (1957) notion of implementing the self-concept in one's career choices assumes that a person has the freedom to choose, while in fact the degree of freedom among members of different socioeconomic strata varies considerably. A broad assumption underlying current vocational theories is that an individual with adequate motivation, information and guidance can move through the educational process to satisfy job goals that allow him or her to express personality or implement the self-concept (Warnath, 1975). This supposition necessarily presupposes that most jobs embody sufficient conditions or outlets to permit such expression; a belief which hardly seems tenable for many occupations in an organizational bureaucratic working structure. Today, adults who do not experience their evolution of career as rational, orderly, and self-fulfilling seem to outnumber their counterparts who do. As Baumgardner (1977) argued: "The world is not necessarily a just place. Good grades and hard work may not insure anything; life events disrupt career plans and career alternatives involve unavoidable tradeoffs" (p. 21).

The dynamic and interactive quality of self and environment throughout one's working life seems inadequately articulated in current perspectives on career development, yet is an essential component of a comprehensive understanding of any developmental process. Development cannot be separated from the environmental context in which it occurs. There is need to evolve a more thorough knowledge of how changes in the self and changes in the environment affect the relationship between the self and the environment, and the implications these changes have for career development. Concerning individual changes, adult developmental theorists such as Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1974) and Vaillant and McArthur (1972) postulate the development of new motives and concerns as one moves through the life cycle which may influence career determinations. Environmental changes, on the other hand, are difficult to describe on a normative basis because of our inability to predict or control many events in the world of work, as well as many social and historical events that can influence an individual's personal and career development. Theorists and researchers have expended considerable effort to identify self and environmental variables in the physiological, psychological, sociological and economic dimensions which affect most workers' career decisions to a greater or lesser extent. However, the research does not seem to have substantially furthered our knowledge concerning how changing self and environmental variables in these four dimensions of career development interact in the lives of individual persons to influence an idiosyncratic course of career evolution.

The dialectic

Dialectical theory and concepts may have considerable relevance for understanding the individualistic nature of career evolution and

for understanding individual growth in the process of career development. A dialectical conception focuses on the individual, the environment, and the relationship between the individual and the environment. Riegel (1976) suggests a dialectical theory apprehends human beings at an intersection of interactions: the changing events within individuals are interacting with and influencing changing events in the environment while, simultaneously, the changing events in the environment are influencing the changing events in individuals. Such a conception might be useful for explaining anticipated and, particularly, unanticipated short- and long-term decisions made and behaviors implemented in evolving a career.

The dialectical process of career development can be characterized as a network of self and environmental interactions involving the following four dimensions: physiological, psychological, sociological and economic. Variables in each dimension have some relative potency at any given time in a person's career evolution. Potency is determined by the individual's assessment of the impact that any one or more self and environmental variables on career determinations. Potency is the result of an individual's perceptions of self, of environment, and of the relationship between self and environment, with one's environment being limited by what one can intellectually understand and what one has actually experienced. Figure 1 illustrates the network of self and environmental interactions.

Insert Figure 1 about here

In the process of evolving a career an individual internalizes information and experiences of a physiological, psychological, sociological

and economic nature. As significant as these internalizations are, of greater importance for the dialectical process are the relationships that exist between and among them. When these relationships are perceived as synchronous or complementary it is assumed that individuals experience relative stability in their working lives and relative job satisfaction. When these relationships are perceived as asynchronous or contradictory it is assumed that individuals, either immediately or over time, encounter some degree of cognitive or behavioral discontinuity and relative job dissatisfaction.

Discontinuity is a term that can be used to symbolize the dialectic. The dialectic represents a contradiction in thoughts and actions (Riegel, 1975) that by its nature disrupts the individual's equilibrium. Equilibrium, a state of homeostasis or personal stability, is a generally recognized psychological construct. Many psychological theories consider internal stability as the desired state for effective behavior and growth. Riegel (1976), whose theorizing concerning dialectical processes in human development is seminal to the conception stated here, postulates that new development is possible only when the individual is in a state of disequilibrium because it is through the restructuring of contradictory interactions that growth occurs.

Discontinuity, depending on the extent to which it disrupts the individual's sense of equilibrium or interferes with environmental demands, may be tolerated for longer or shorter periods of time. As discontinuity is permitted to fester or remain unrecognized it can become more intense and be experienced as conflict or crisis. Conflict is a term used to represent the experiencing of discontinuity beyond a point which can be tolerated indefinitely. Conflicts are characterized by a moderate level of personal discomfort sufficient to

focus an individual's attention to the need for elimination of existing discontinuity over time, or at least reduction to a state which is more tolerable. Physical, emotional, or behavioral discomforts are likely to be situationally induced rather than be experienced as pervasive. Crisis may or may not be encountered initially as conflict. A sudden or unanticipated drastic change in some aspect of the self or the environment might result in a discontinuity generating crisis. Crises are characterized by a high level of discomfort experienced as physical, emotional, or behavioral manifestations of personal suffering. Discomforts are likely to be experienced as pervasive. An individual in crisis perceives discontinuity as sufficiently painful or as sufficiently interfering with environmental demands to warrant immediate attention to the need for its resolution.

The discontinuities which result from ongoing interactions between the self and the environment form the basis for individual growth in career development. Growth is an idiosyncratic spiral of career insights and self-awarenesses which result from one's continuing resolution of conflicts and crises. The initial step toward resolution involves the individual's accepting the responsibility to deal with restructuring discontinuity. The next task involves the identification of those relationships which are contradictory. One examines the origins of one's discontinuity and focuses on issues to be explored in moving toward its restructuring. Compromising is the term used to describe that combination of thinking and experiencing in which individuals consider the ways in which the relationship of the variables resulting in discontinuity can be modified. Alternatives are reviewed and projected consequences are considered. An individual progressively blends these considerations in arriving at decisions and implementing

trial behaviors presumed to eliminate, or reduce to a state which is tolerable, the original discontinuity. Restructuring of discontinuity, thereby altering the patterns of interaction among physiological, psychological, sociological and economic variables, tends to create new discontinuity within the self or in relationship with the environment. In this sense discontinuity is never fully resolved and equilibrium is never completely achieved. Thus the dialectical process is postulated to be perpetually active. New discontinuities emerge in place of former discontinuities that have been restructured, providing new opportunities for individual growth in career development. Figure 2 illustrates the cyclical pattern of the dialectical process.

Insert Figure 2 about here

This exploratory study was undertaken to determine whether the relationships among variables suggested in a dialectical theory of career development could be identified and described empirically. Six content objectives were set forth as follows: (1) To identify self and environmental variables in the four dimensions of career development (physiological, psychological, sociological and economic) impinging on an individual at one point in time in evolving a career; (2) to identify synchronous and contradictory relationships between interacting self and environmental variables; (3) to differentiate relative potencies among existing discontinuities; (4) to describe the experiencing of conflict; (5) to describe the experiencing of crisis; and (6) to describe involvement in compromising.

Method

Respondents

'P' Respondents were selected from a population of students and recent graduates of an alternative college-level educational institution for adults and a population of prospective clients at a university adult counseling center, all of whom volunteered to be solicited for involvement in the research. Members of these special populations were asked to participate based on the assumptions that (1) adults committing themselves to a degree program in higher education beyond the age traditionally associated with college enrollment, or (2) adults committing themselves to educational-vocational counseling, may have been motivated to such action out of a need for resolution of existing conflicts or crises.

'P' Three criteria were used for selection of respondents. They are as follows: (1) The sample was restricted to individuals who acknowledged awareness of both satisfying and dissatisfying aspects of their respective jobs. This criterion was set forth under the assumption that satisfying and dissatisfying aspects represented, respectively, synchronous and contradictory relationships between interacting variables impinging on the individual at this time in evolving a career. The decision regarding an individual's suitability for inclusion in the study was made by the investigator following a preliminary informal telephone interview in which potential respondents were asked about their awareness of satisfying and dissatisfying aspects of their jobs, and their willingness to discuss those aspects in depth. (2) A requirement of six months employment in present occupation was imposed under the assumption that six months would be sufficient time for discontinuity to emerge in the respondents' current jobs. (3) Individuals less than 30 years of age were excluded due to the

greater likelihood of younger adults encountering incongruity between personal characteristics and environmental demands in their early contacts with the world of work (Holland, 1973). A dialectical conception of career development holds that discontinuity can and does occur at all ages in one's working life, including the years beyond 30 corresponding to Super's (1957) Establishment and Maintenance stages wherein an individual is expected to have found an appropriate occupational field and put forth the effort to make a permanent place in it. This criterion was set forth to identify the experiencing of discontinuity in age ranges that would not be as readily anticipated by the traditional developmental perspective on career development.

'P'

Thirteen individuals from the population of adult students satisfied these criteria. The nine female and four male respondents ranged in age from 32 to 59 years. Only one member of the population of adult counseling clients, a 32 year old male, satisfied all three criteria. Thus the total sample consisted of fourteen respondents.

Instrument

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The instrument used for data collection was the semi-structured interview developed by the investigator. The interview schedule focused on the following six broad areas: (1) educational-vocational background; (2) factors influencing current occupational choice; (3) self and environmental parameters of the current job; (4) sources of job satisfaction; (5) sources of job dissatisfaction; and (6) resolution of discontinuities. Scheduled leads were provided to elicit required information. Primers were included as suggested leads to elicit additional information or improve the quality of the respondent's original answers. It was the interviewer's task to inquire into each area until he (the the interviewer-investigator) was satisfied that the

Information required had been elicited. An interviewer's manual was developed which specified and elaborated on the purposes, parameters, and problems associated with the scheduled and suggested leads. Instructions were provided to guide the interviewer's conduct in pursuing each area within a range of considerable flexibility. The interviewer was expected, if necessary, to modify the wording of scheduled leads so as to be more appropriate for individual respondents. Reformulations were undertaken based on the information elicited during the interview in order to make the inquiry more personally relevant and the language more congenial for the respondent. New questions were added as the situation merited to pursue salient issues with individual respondents.

'P'

The interviewer-investigator, an advanced graduate student, was involved in 14 hours of practice using the interview schedule and manual. Audiotapes of seven practice sessions conducted with other adults satisfying the selection criteria were reviewed by the investigator and his mentor leading to refinement of the instrument to its present form. The three step process of development, trial, and revision served the purposes of evaluating the theoretical and practical significance of the content of the leads, improving the format in which the content was presented, and enhancing the interviewer's technical skills.

Procedure

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All participants were contacted by telephone and explained the selection criteria. Respondents agreed to participate in an interview, approximately two hours long, which was arranged at a time and place of their convenience. Seven interviews were conducted in a quiet room at the university, four in respondents' work settings, and three in respondents' homes. Permission was granted to audiotape the interviews.

Analysis

The analysis of tapes was performed by the investigator. Statements were identified that were believed relevant to one or more of the six content objectives of the study. An attempt was made to minimize drawing inferences in analyzing these data; however, some inferences were necessary to define what the data revealed. The assignment of variables to one of the four dimensions of career development was aided by consulting a variety of sources identifying physiological, psychological, sociological and economic factors influencing careers (Krumboltz, 1976; Munson, 1971), worker motivations and dissatisfactions (Herzberg, 1966), and worker trait components (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965). However, the actual classifying of variables was determined by the investigator.

Results

Respondents were differentiated based on their experiencing of the dialectical process in order to facilitate the reporting of results. All respondents are subsumed in three groups. The four members of group 1 identified no personally significant discontinuity. Group 2 consists of seven respondents who identified one discontinuity each was presently experiencing, without accompanying conflict or crisis. Group 3 has three respondents who identified one or more discontinuities and revealed some aspects of conflict. Descriptive characteristics relevant to the six content objectives are reported. Sketches summarizing selected respondents' current status in the dialectical process are included. Figures illustrating the self-environmental interaction patterns described in the sketches follow.

Group 1 - No discontinuity

Four respondents identified no personally significant discontinuity

presently experienced. Only synchronous relationships between interacting variables in the four dimensions of career development were described. The more potent relationships tended to be between respondents' interests, aptitudes, or values and the work activities or work situations involved in the performance of job duties. Each respondent reported feelings of greater job satisfaction relative to job dissatisfaction. No individual described experiencing any aspects of conflict or crisis. Table I summarizes respondent characteristics according to age, sex, occupational group, and length of employment in the current job.

Insert Table I about here

Two sketches describing synchronous relationships between self and environmental variables are presented.

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Sketch 1. Mr. A's abilities in comprehending and visualizing spatial relationships are synchronous with the work tasks (e.g., sketching, laying out) performed in his duties as a mechanical design engineer. His preference for scientific and technical work activities is, similarly, in synchrony with designing work tasks. Mr. A's needs for respect in the work role are synchronous with the status of professionalism associated with his occupational group and the salary that is his financial remuneration. His aspirations for job advancement are synchronous with the managerial position Mr. A anticipates qualifying for upon satisfying educational preparation requirements.

Insert Figure 3 about here

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Sketch 2. Ms. D's interests in working with people for their presumed benefit is synchronous with her job duties as a social worker wherein she attends to the physical and emotional needs of the elderly. Her preference for work activities in which there are tangibly satisfying results is synchronous with tasks she performs such as arranging transportation and providing meals for senior adults requesting assistance. Ms. D's religious values as expressed in her personal plan for salvation preclude involvement in an occupational role enhancing her own prestige at the expense of co-workers. Her comparatively low salary (\$220/month) as a part-time employee is synchronous with her need to perceive herself noncompetitively with others aspiring for greater financial remuneration and job status.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Although none of the respondents in group 1 identified personally significant discontinuity presently experienced, one individual, Ms. B, described exploratory thinking and action toward eliminating an anticipated discontinuity. The following sketch suggests Ms. B's involvement in compromising:

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Sketch 3. Ms. B averages 15 working hours per week by contracting her services to nonprofit community organizations as a public relations representative for special projects and events. She expects a substantial increase in personal economic needs during the next decade in anticipation of college tuition expenses for her four children. Considering full-time employment in public relations management, Ms. B foresees the emergence of discontinuity if engaged in promotional work activities which contradict her social values. To publicly promote

products, concepts, or persons she would not privately endorse could, she believes, generate a situation perceived as personally intolerable. Presently Ms. B is exploring work alternatives that provide financial remuneration synchronous with projected economic needs, synchronous with her preference for work tasks of a creative nature, and synchronous with her personal and social values. One activity she is trying herself out in during nonworking hours is in designing children's toys.

Insert Figure 5 about here

Group 2 - One discontinuity

Seven respondents each identified one discontinuity in the relationship between a self and environmental variable. Synchronous relationships between interacting variables in the four dimensions of career development were identified as well, but due to the relevance of discontinuity for the dialectical process only the contradictory relationship is described. As a group, respondents ranged from very satisfied to mildly dissatisfied in the job. Although discontinuity was experienced as a dissatisfier, each respondent suggested he or she could tolerate the discontinuity, if necessary, for an indefinite period. No individual described experiencing any aspects of conflict or crisis. Table II summarizes respondent characteristics.

Insert Table II about here

Sketches for each respondent describing discontinuity in the relationship between self and environmental variables are presented.

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Sketch 4. Mr. E's preference for interacting with people in

social situations and assisting them in resolving work-related interpersonal problems has emerged, over time, as more potent than his preference for work activities that are nonsocial in nature. A discontinuity exists between Mr. E's interests and the duties of his job. The latter involve adjusting, repairing, and monitoring technical equipment, generally in physical isolation from others.

Insert Figure 6 about here

'P'

Sketch 5. Ms. F's need for work role prestige in the form of advancement has been frustrated twice during the past two years as she has applied for, but did not receive, administrative positions in medical technology. A discontinuity exists between Ms. F's need for work role status and (the lack of) current promotional opportunity in her work setting.

Insert Figure 7 about here

'P'

Sketch 6. Mr. G's interests include a preference for working on problems of a technical nature requiring a creative solution. To implement his recommendations in an industrial setting requires a substantial investment of materials and labor. A discontinuity exists between Mr. G's interests, as they are expressed through his work activities, and the spending policies governing the company's allocation of resources. Mr. G perceives budgetary constraints as inhibiting his creativity.

Insert Figure 8 about here

'P'

Sketch 7. Ms. E's interests involving a preference for work tasks in coordinating and directing the work activities of others are contrary to the duties of her job in nursing wherein she is primarily engaged in evaluation of nursing services. A discontinuity exists between Ms. E's preference for supervising people and the heavy emphasis on data analysis that is required in her job.

Insert Figure 9 about here

'P'

Sketch 8. Ms. I's experiencing of discontinuity concerns the relationship between social-cultural work values she has internalized and the salary she earns (\$1000/year). She is employed 15 hours per week in community relations and recruitment work activities for an institution of higher education. Ms. I expressed a need for substantially higher financial remuneration based on the perception that her salary is below the range necessary to receive the social approval merited by her level of competency.

Insert Figure 10 about here

'P'

Sketch 9. Ms. J's need for recognition of the value of work in organizing and promoting recreational activities for hospital in-patients is contradicted by her perception of the lack of recognition afforded her work role by hospital administrators. A discontinuity exists between job status needs and recognition.

Insert Figure 11 about here

'P'

Sketch 10. Mr. K's confronting behavior in situations wherein he tries to influence the attitudes and judgments of others has incurred the contempt of supervisors, co-workers and subordinates who experience him as abrasive and combative. A discontinuity exists between Mr. K's interpersonal behaviors aimed at earning respect and the disrespect he perceives has been netted in work role interactions.

Insert Figure 12 about here

Four respondents (Ms. F, Ms. H, Ms. I, Mr. K) indicated they were not presently involved in trying to restructure the contradictory self-environmental relationship. Rather, they expected to cope with discontinuity as it exists. The subgroup of four did, however, express the hope for resolution of discontinuity in the unspecified future, but could not identify changes in self or environmental variables they might try to make.

Three respondents (Mr. E, Mr. G, Ms. J) described trial strategies they were using toward reducing discontinuity. For example, in the short-term Mr. E is trying to arrange the performance of his work tasks to coincide with the schedules of other workers, thereby providing greater opportunity for social interaction. Toward long-term resolution Mr. E is earning college credit through a program of business management and human resources development in order to qualify for a supervisory role that would enable him to interact more directly with people and their problems in the work setting. In the short-term Mr. G is using nonemployed time to develop cost-benefit justifications for the implementation of his engineering designs. Long-term resolution may come as a result of Mr. G's exploring the work role of engineering

consultant as an alternative to his present job. He is trying to discover whether such a role would afford him significantly greater negotiating power than he exercises in his current staff position. In the short-term Ms. J is trying to make her work activities more visible by using a variety of settings for recreation in and around the hospital. By increasing administrators' awareness, she expects to gain additional recognition for her work role. Effort toward long-term resolution is embodied in Ms. J's decision to become actively involved in her local professional organization. There, she is exploring action alternatives toward raising the status of jobs associated with recreational therapy. The development and implementation of the trial strategies described above are indicative of involvement in compromising. Each respondent expressed the view that awareness of discontinuity had motivational impact toward initiating the activities he or she subsequently became involved in.

Group 3 - Conflict

Three respondents identified one or more discontinuities presently experienced in the relationship between self and environmental variables. In addition, each described some aspects of conflict presumed to have been generated by existing discontinuities. Members of group 3 were differentiated from other respondents on the basis that discontinuity was experienced as dissatisfying to a point beyond which it could be tolerated for an indefinite period. Although the demand for immediate resolution was not expressed, each respondent suggested that discontinuity, left unresolved, could become intolerable. At least two respondents described manifestations of discomfort attributed to their experiencing of discontinuity. Emotional and behavioral manifestations were described as situational rather than pervasive that is, they tended

to occur only when the respondent thought about the discontinuity or experienced it behaviorally in a self-environmental interaction. Synchronous relationships between interacting variables in the four dimensions of career development were identified as well, but due to the relevance of discontinuity for the dialectical process only the contradictory relationships are described. The three respondents differed in their perceptions of job satisfaction. Mr. L described himself as very dissatisfied in the job, while Ms. N viewed herself as mildly dissatisfied. Ms. M distinguished between feelings about her job which was experienced as very satisfying, and feelings about the discontinuity which was highly dissatisfying and approaching her limit of tolerance. Ms. M and Ms. N described thinking and behavior indicative of compromising aimed at short- and long-term resolution of discontinuities. Table III summarizes respondent characteristics.

Insert Table III about here

Sketches for each respondent describing discontinuities, aspects of conflict, and involvement in compromising are presented.

'R'

Sketch 11. Mr. L, a paralegal assistant, described two discontinuities. The more potent one involves the contradiction between Mr. L's need for esteem in the form of praise from superiors and his perception that only negative recognition is received. The second discontinuity concerns the relationship between Mr. L's aspirations for job advancement and the preparation requirements for job promotion. Despite his perception of the high quality of his on-the-job performance, absence of positive recognition notwithstanding, Mr. L lacks the formal education necessary for

advancement in law and jurisprudence. Mr. L described occasional feelings of depression and powerlessness attributed to existing discontinuities. His attitude of self-depreciation seems to be experienced as sufficiently acute to focus his awareness to the need for their elimination, or at least reduction. However, Mr. L did not describe involvement in exploratory thinking or behavior aimed at restructuring contradictory relationships. He noted with a sense of resignation that he could neither make a change in himself or his environment that would alter the discontinuities, although he anticipated the situation would become increasingly intolerable as discontinuities were permitted to remain unresolved. Mr. L expressed the hope that sometime in the unspecified future he could secure a job that would be more personally satisfying, but could not describe the parameters of such a job or the process by which he might investigate it.

Insert Figure 13 about here

'p'

Sketch 12. Ms. M, a volunteer worker in a social work occupation, advises, counsels and gives information to adults requesting assistance in coping with their adolescent children's drug-related problems. A discontinuity exists between Ms. M's need for recognition, in the form of financial remuneration signifying the value of her personal work effort, and the nonsalaried status of her volunteer position. She distinguished between feelings of satisfaction concerning the job duties and dissatisfaction about the financial remuneration. Ms. M did not identify manifestations of discomfort attributed to discontinuity. On the contrary, she expressed a feeling of excitement at the opportunity

to confront a personally significant issue around equating worthiness with monetary reward. Toward short-term restructuring of the contradictory relationship Ms. M has applied for state and federal funds via grant proposals she has written. Another strategy has been to propose to various community agencies the creation of a salaried position to implement a parents' assistance program. Ms. M has suggested that the experiencing of discontinuity in pursuing her present work activities could become intolerable should efforts at short-term resolution fail. In anticipation of this possibility she is exploring her feelings about making a change to a salaried position in a different occupational category. Exploratory thinking focuses on the projected consequences concerning the relationships between other self and environmental variables of relevance. For example, the synchronous relationship between Ms. M's interests, involving a preference for working with people for their benefit, and the nature of her work activities, would likely be affected. Toward long-term resolution of discontinuity Ms. M is trying to clarify for herself the tradeoffs she is prepared to make.

Insert Figure 14 about here

'p'

Sketch 13. Ms. N, a part-time nurse and art (metalsmithing) instructor at a private school (K-12), identified two discontinuities. The more potent one concerns the salary that is Ms. N's financial remuneration in relation to what are her personal economic resources and perceived economic needs. Recently Ms. N's husband incurred costly medical expenses. His premature retirement at the end of this year for failing health places further strain on the couple's decreasing

personal savings. The second discontinuity exists between Ms. N's declining physical endurance and the working hours required to maintain two jobs. She reported feeling excessive fatigue by mid-afternoon. Ms. N described occasional feelings of anxiety and depression attributed to the more potent discontinuity. She added that intermittent sleeplessness at night when worrying about economic considerations worsens mid-afternoon fatigue. Her experiencing of anxiety seems sufficiently acute to focus her awareness to the need for elimination, or at least reduction, of existing discontinuities; particularly in the economic dimension. Toward restructuring she has proposed shortening her working hours to the school's headmaster. To do so is expected to reduce the discontinuity in the physiological dimension. Anticipating additional nonworking hours in the afternoon, Ms. N is exploring training opportunities in metalsmithing. Due to the sedentary nature of the work involved in benchwork occupations, Ms. N foresees less of a demand on her physical strength and endurance than in her current work roles. Her short-term objective is to refine her aptitudes (manual and finger dexterity) to a level where she could earn supplemental income through work activities involving the assembly and repair of jewelry and silverware. A more long-term goal is to create a viable full-time employment alternative in metalsmithing which could eliminate, or reduce to a point more tolerable, the discontinuities in the economic and physiological dimensions.

Insert Figure 15 about here

Discussion

Toward evaluating how well a dialectical conception of career development corresponds to reality, it is first necessary to determine whether the relationships among variables suggested in theory can be identified and described empirically. From the results of this study it can be concluded that individuals were able to discriminate synchronous and contradictory relationships between self and environmental variables in the physiological, psychological, sociological and economic dimensions impinging at one point in time in evolving a career. When two discontinuities existed simultaneously, individuals appeared able to differentiate their relative potencies. The results also suggest it was possible to distinguish individuals experiencing conflict from those not experiencing conflict, and individuals involved in compromising from those not involved in compromising.

With regard for the dialectical process some results were consistent with theoretical expectations; however, several unanticipated findings were also discovered. For example, although the majority of respondents identified at least one discontinuity presently experienced, there were four respondents who identified only synchronous relationships. The fact that the individuals comprising group 1 did not perceive even one discontinuity is surprising; although it might be explained by the idea that discontinuity was not sufficiently potent at the time to be regarded as personally significant. Another unanticipated finding was the apparently strong impact of discontinuity to motivate individuals to participate in compromising. In theory it had been proposed that the experiencing of conflict was an intermediate step between awareness of discontinuity and involvement in compromising. The results indicated that some individuals engaged in compromising even

though they acknowledged their discontinuity could be tolerated for an indefinite period. One respondent, Ms. B, even described compromising activities in anticipation of restructuring discontinuity not yet encountered in a concrete sense. Other individuals seemed disinclined to seek compromise solutions; perhaps because they believed there was no change in self or environment they could make to reduce discontinuity. These findings challenge the assumption of universality underlying the dialectical process outlined in this paper. The third unanticipated result involved one respondent's experiencing of conflict without accompanying manifestations of personal discomfort. This finding suggests a broader conception of conflict than has been articulated. It may be possible to distinguish between at least two varieties of conflict; those situations in which discontinuity is more negative in nature and discomfort is manifest, and those situations wherein discontinuity is more positive in nature. A person might welcome conflict as an opportunity to resolve a personally significant discontinuity, as appears to have been demonstrated by Ms. M in this study.

Toward evaluating the validity of the substantive findings, certain assumptions concerning the research methodology prior to its implementation and during the investigation can be considered retrospectively. A critical assumption was that respondents were accurate in the information they revealed about themselves and their careers. While it is acknowledged that verbal reports are subject to unverifiable sources of distortion, the fact that the data elicited can have immediate and important impact on the respondents' working and living seems to have provided motivation for thoughtful and honest communication. After the interview was completed nearly every respondent suggested that his or her participation was helpful toward clarifying personally

meaningful career-related issues. Furthermore, the presence of a skilled interviewer verifying the information and confronting the respondent with apparent discrepancies probably helped minimize distortion. Finally, the interviewer's manual helped focus attention to the purposes, parameters, and problems associated with each lead so as to facilitate data gathering. A second assumption was that the interviewer was able to achieve rapport and establish an atmosphere in which respondents would feel free to report honestly. Once again, the post-interview reactions of individuals suggests that such an atmosphere was established.

Unfortunately, the unique advantages of the research interview are often overlooked. It is believed that this study capitalized on the individual's most powerful and versatile form of communication; language. The flexibility of the interview format allowed the investigator to follow the respondent's own lines of thought. Personally relevant material was immediately pursued without regard for a standardized procedure. By incorporating aspects of the biographically-oriented and clinically-oriented interviews, it is suggested that the overall purpose of the research, to explore and describe, was best served.

The results of this exploratory study stimulate the following broad questions to be researched: (1) Are there commonalities according to age or sex regarding the emergence of specific discontinuities? (2) Are there commonalities among workers performing similar jobs regarding the emergence of specific discontinuities? (3) Are discontinuities involving certain physiological, psychological, sociological or economic variables more likely to generate conflict? (4) How can we account for individual differences in recognizing and dealing with discontinuity? Further work is also needed in empirically describing crisis and growth in career development.

In conclusion it is felt that the present study contributed relevant information to understanding and extending concepts that are central to a dialectical approach to career phenomena. These understandings are fundamental to more rigorous empirical study of a dialectical process of career development.

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Table I. Summary of respondent characteristics for group 1.

Respondent	Age	Sex	Occupational group ¹	Length of employment in current job
A	32	Male	Mechanical engineering	3 years
B	38	Female	Public relations management	not applicable ²
C	46	Female	Administrative specializations	1 year
D	55	Female	Social and welfare work	7 months

¹Occupational group determined according to the three-digit classification of the U.S. Department of Labor (1977).

²Respondent B is employed on an individual short-term contract basis.

Table II. Summary of respondent characteristics for group 2.

Respondent	Age	Sex	Occupational group ¹	Length of employment in current job
E	33	Male	Repair of electrical and electronics products	7 years
F	34	Female	Medical and dental technology	2 years
G	35	Male	Industrial engineering	10 months
H	35	Female	Registered nursing	8 years
I	36	Female	Public relations management	1 year
J	49	Female	Social and welfare work	3 years
K	50	Male	Industrial engineering	6 years

¹Occupational group determined according to the three-digit classification of the U.S. Department of Labor (1977).

Table III. Summary of respondent characteristics for group 3.

Respondent	Age	Sex	Occupational group ¹	Length of employment in current job
L	32	Male	Law and jurisprudence	2 years
M	46	Female	Social and welfare work	1 year
N	59	Female	Registered nursing/ Secondary school education	16 years/3 years

¹Occupational group determined according to the three-digit classification of the U.S. Department of Labor (1977).

Figure 1. The network of dialectical interactions.

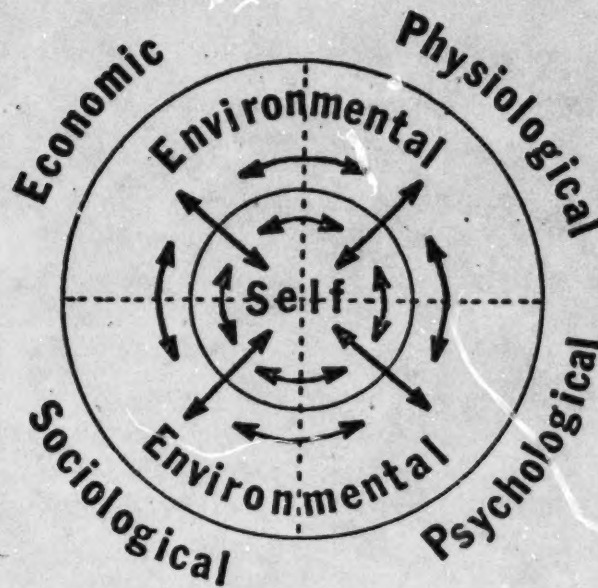


Figure 2. The cyclical pattern of the dialectical process.

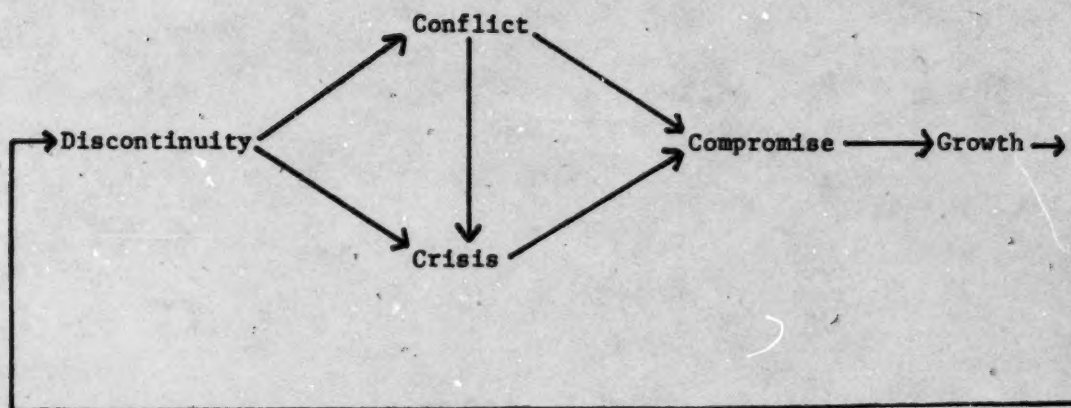


Figure 3. Synchronous self-environmental interactions described in sketch 1.

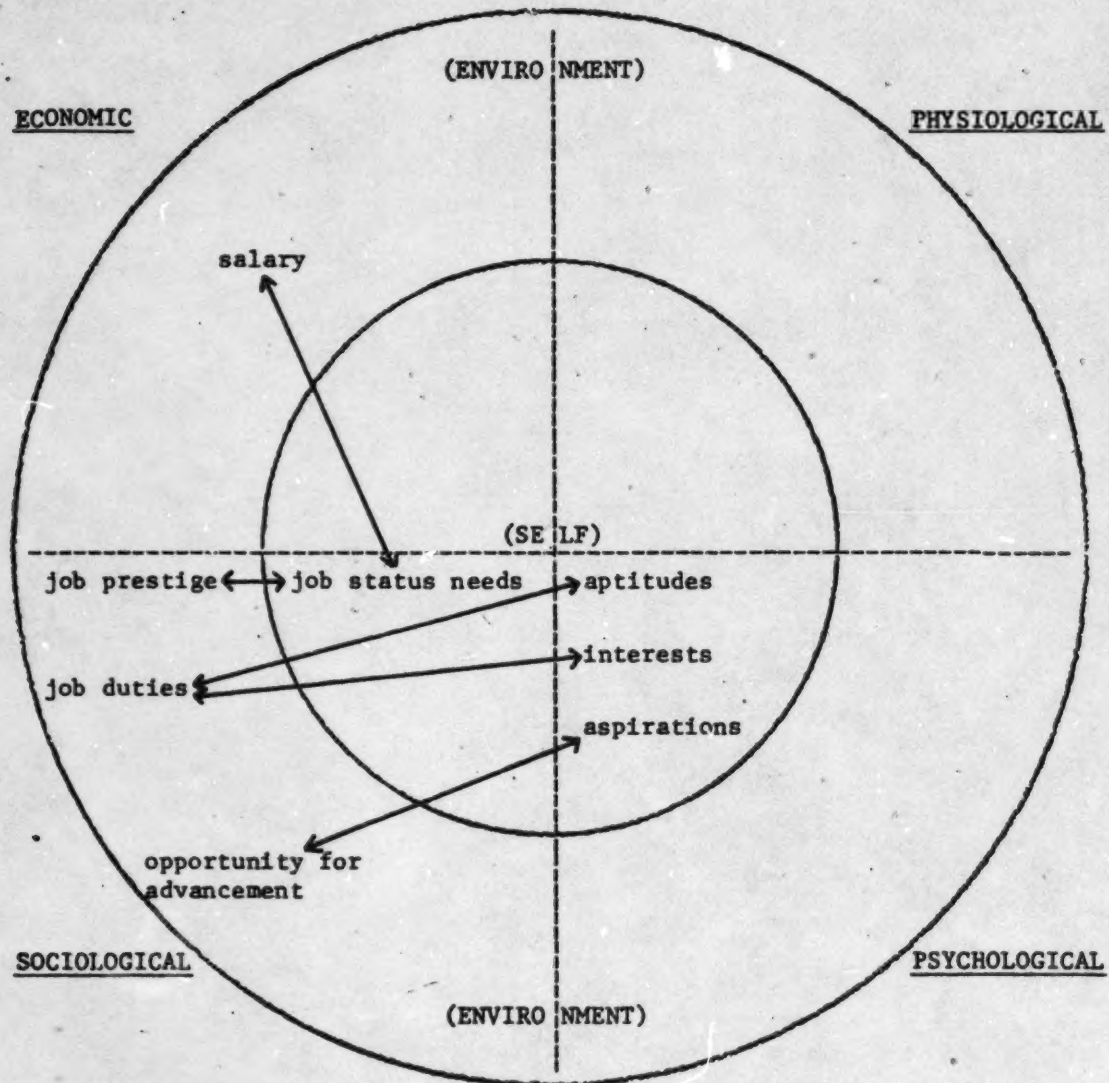


Figure 4. Synchronous self-environmental interactions described in sketch 2.

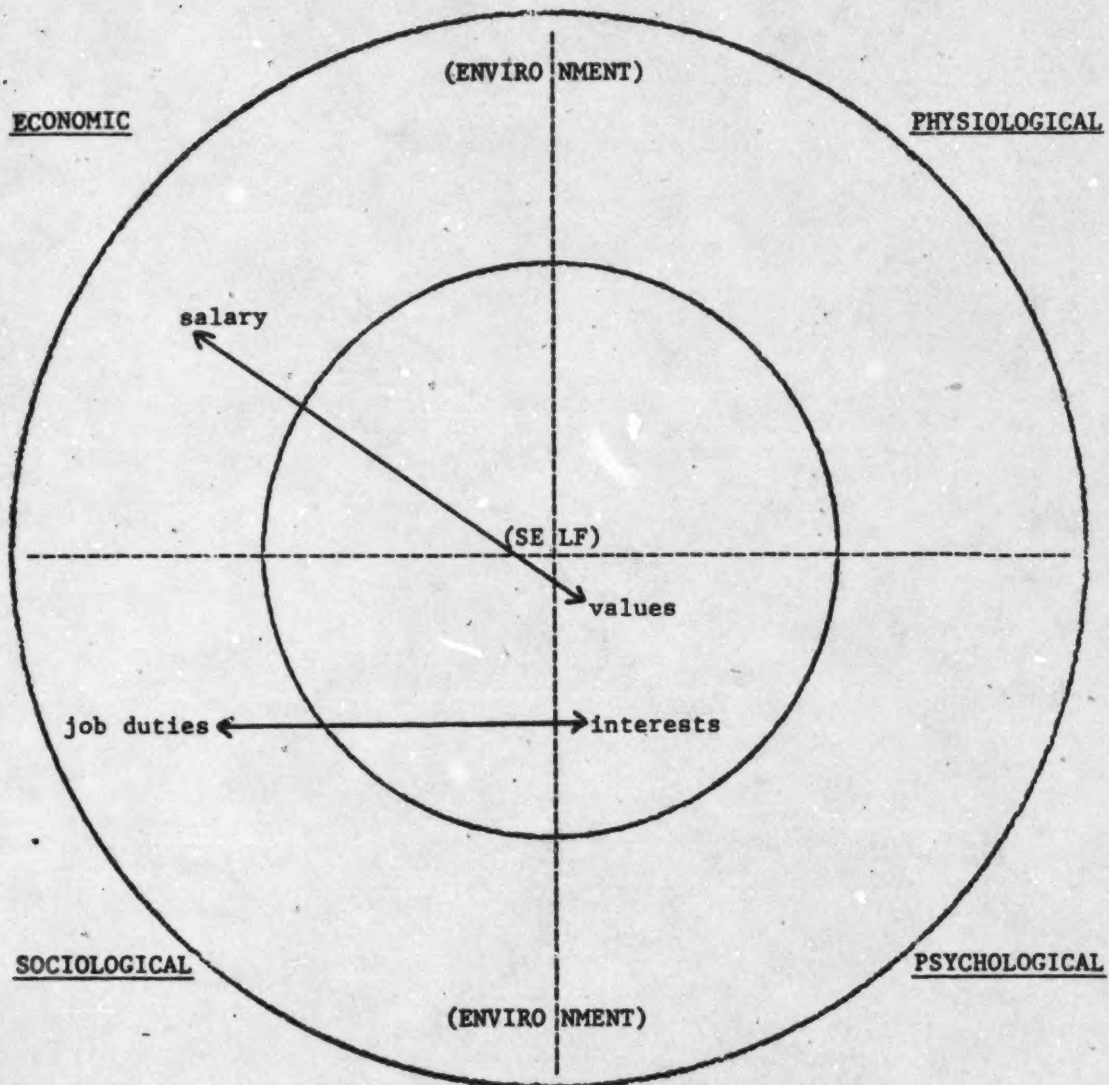


Figure 5. Anticipated contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 3.

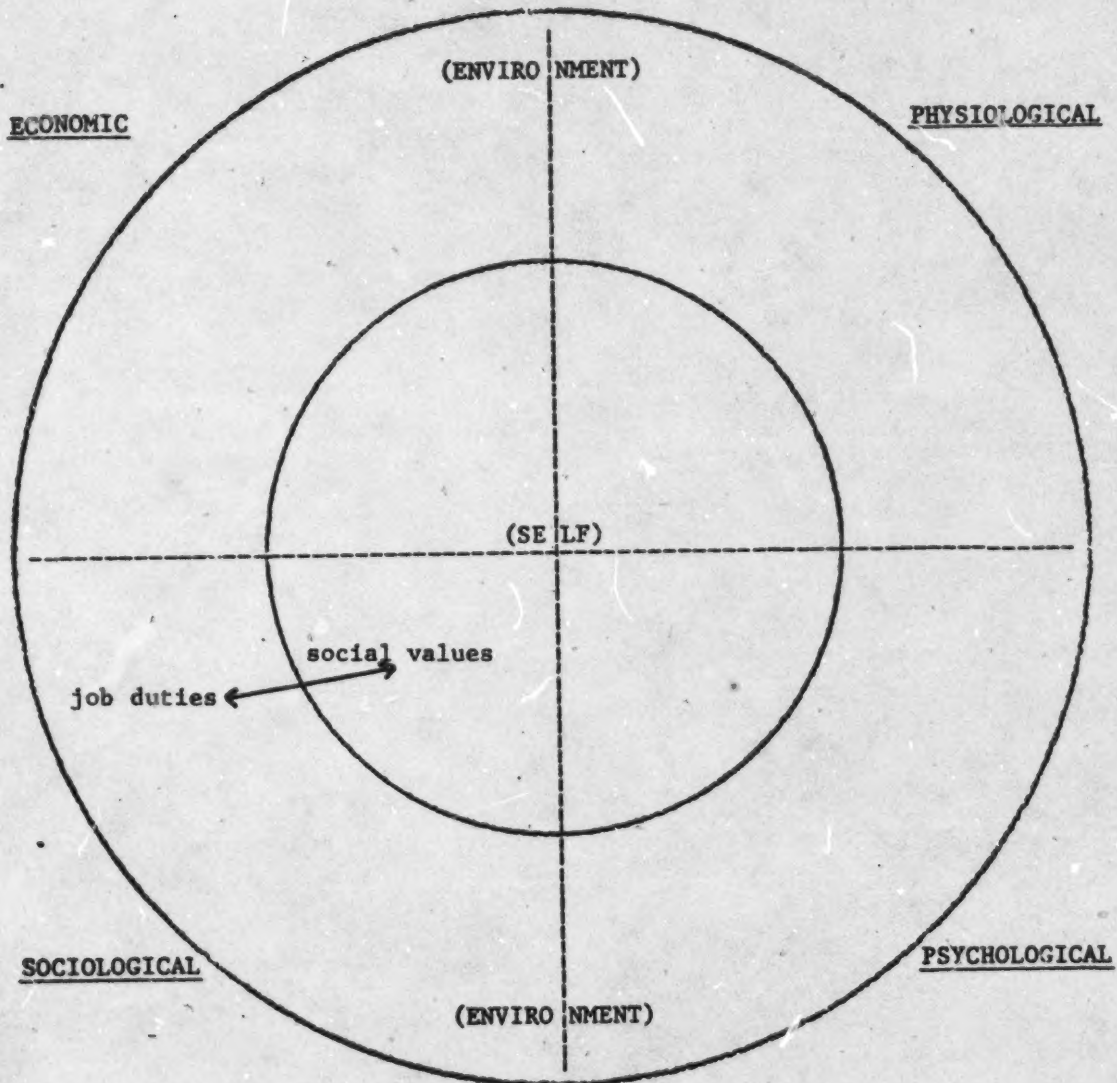


Figure 6. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 4.

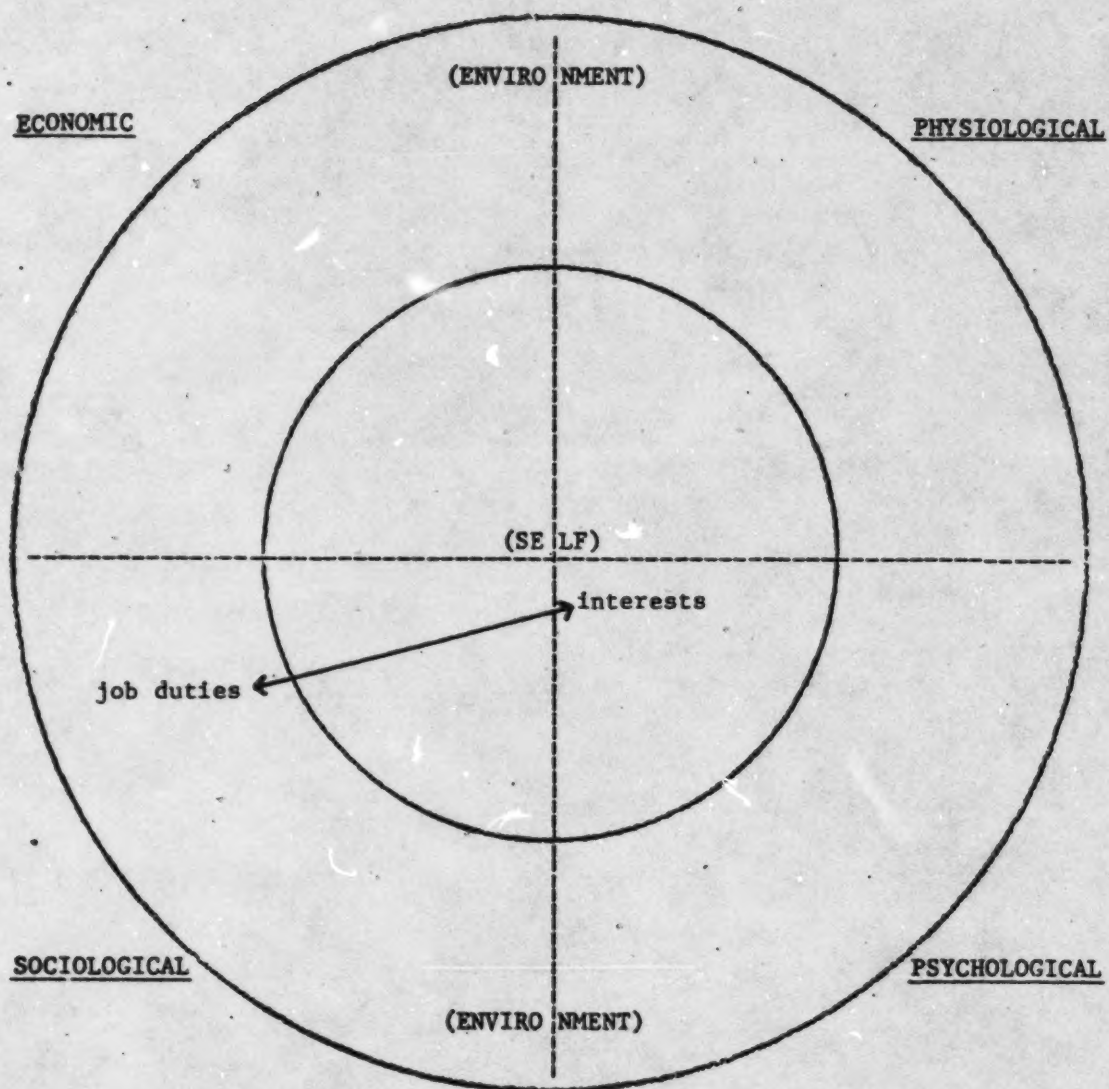


Figure 7. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 5.

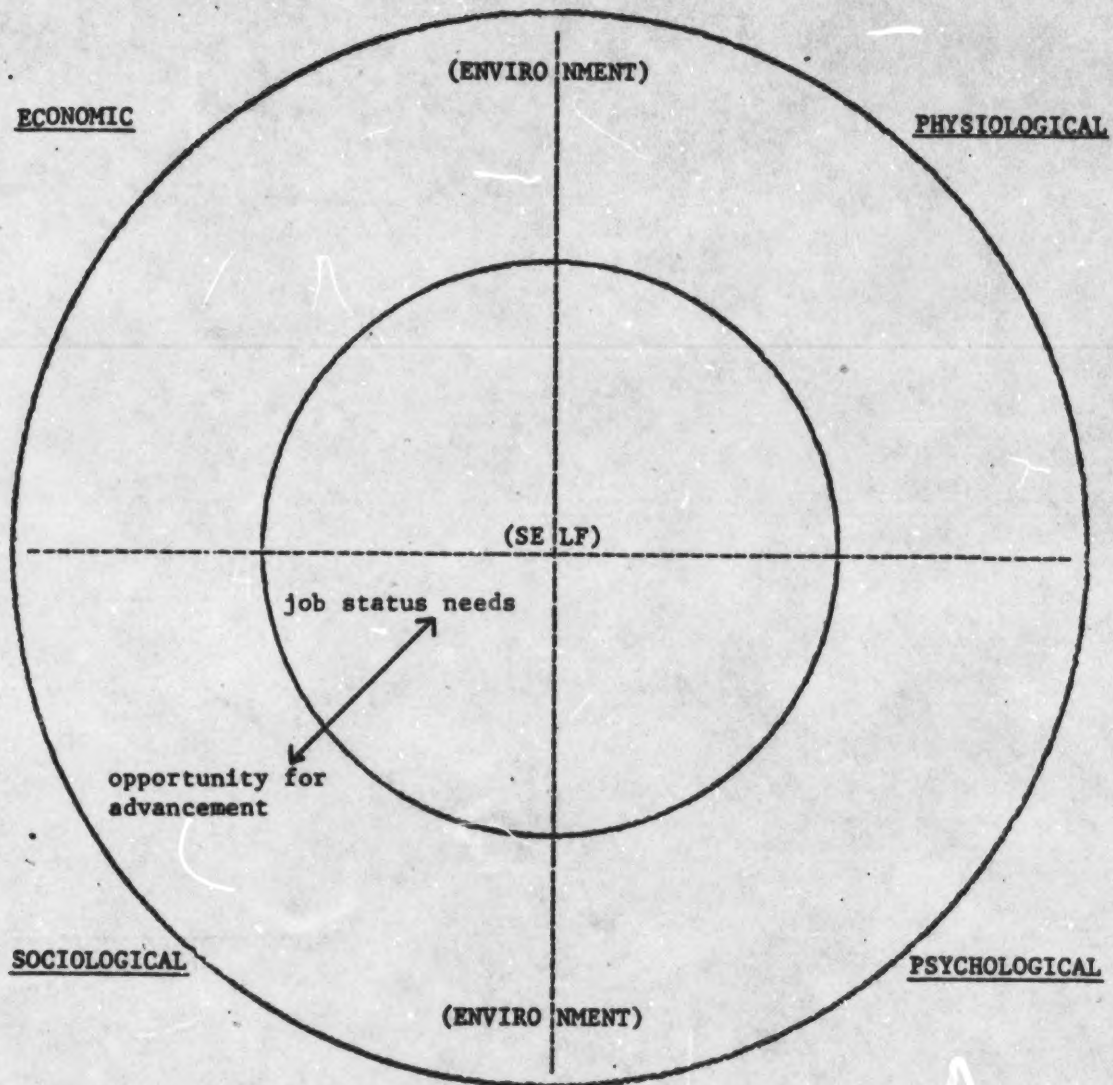


Figure 8. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 6.

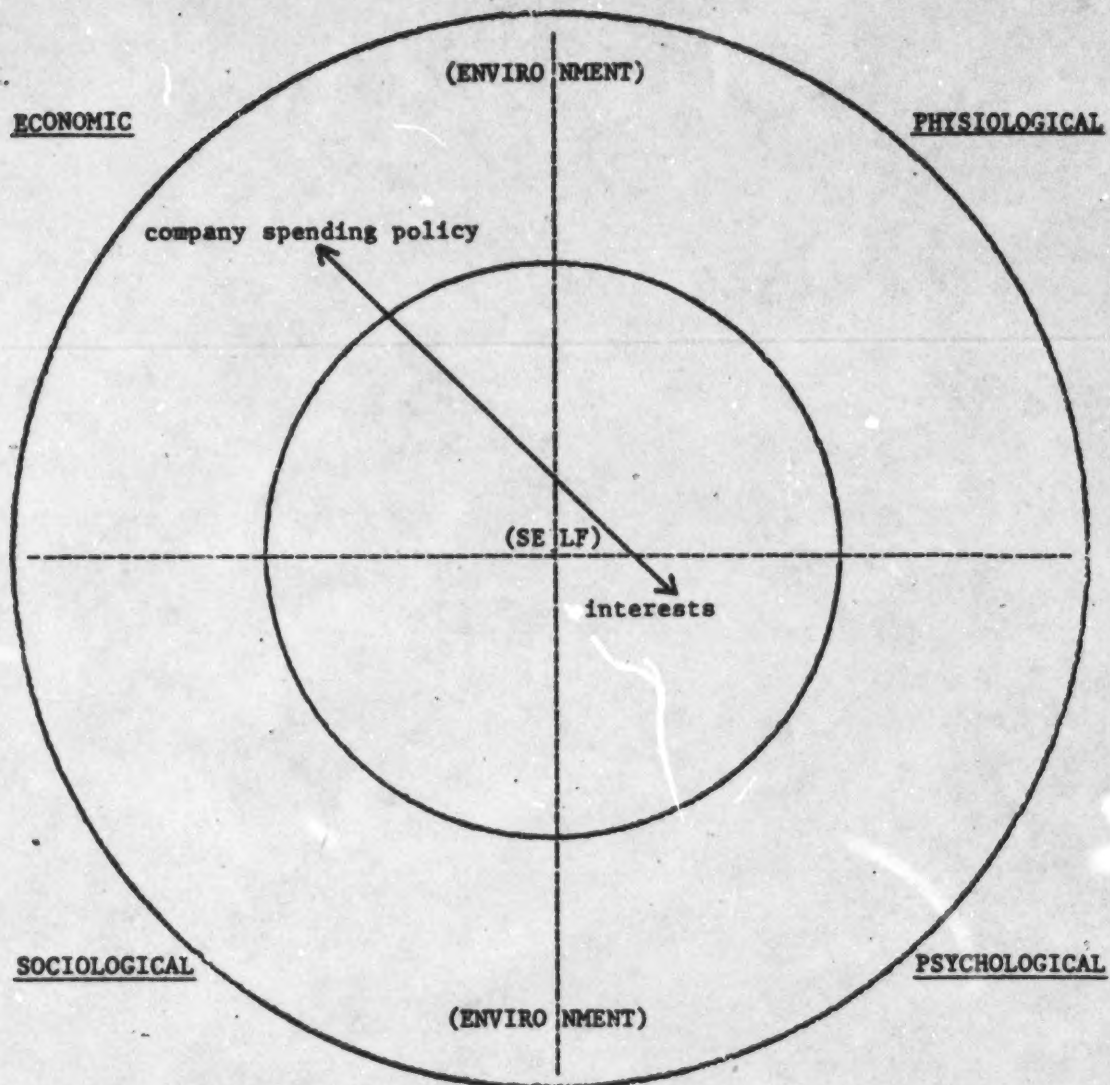


Figure 9. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 7.

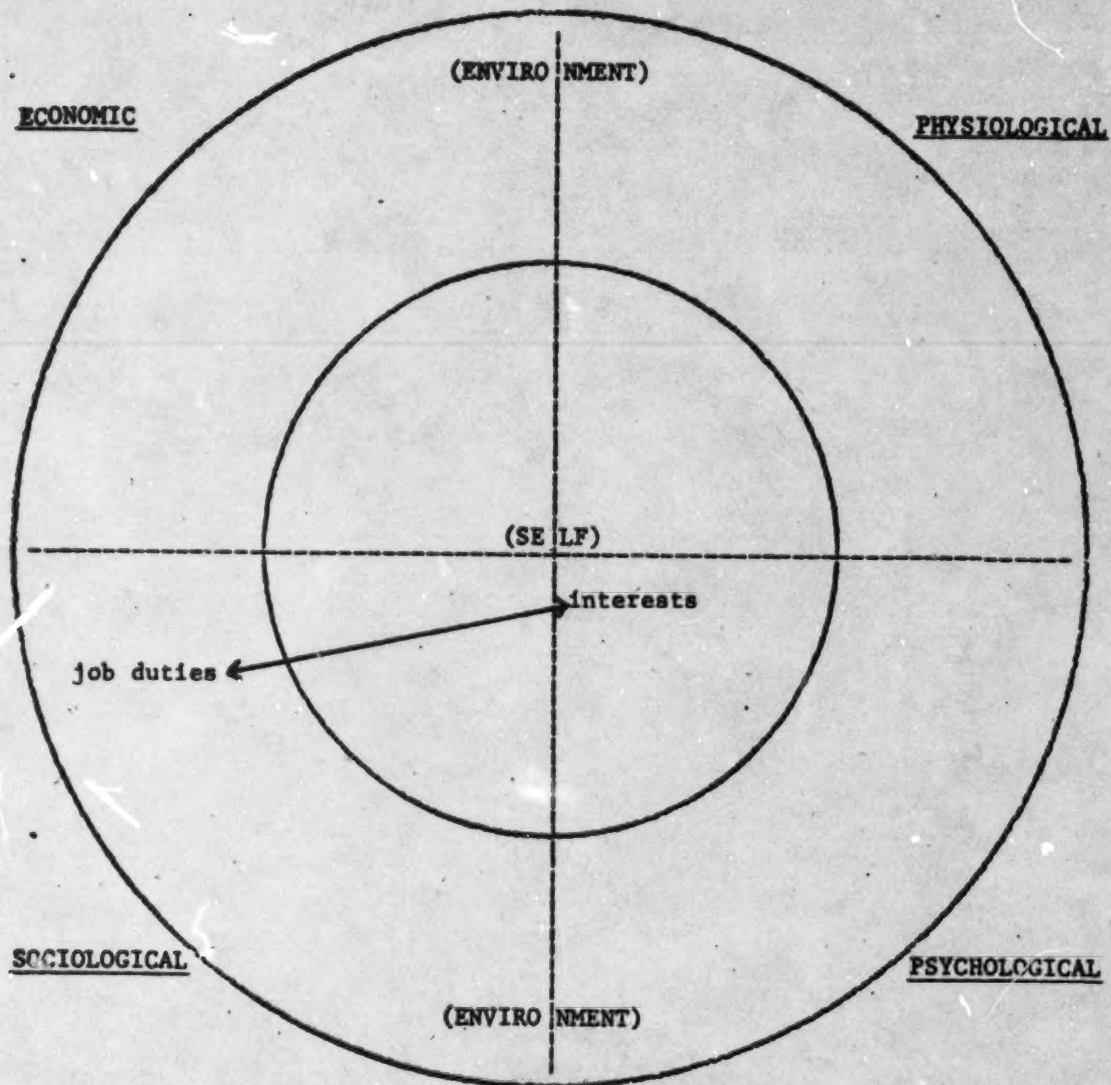


Figure 10. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 8.

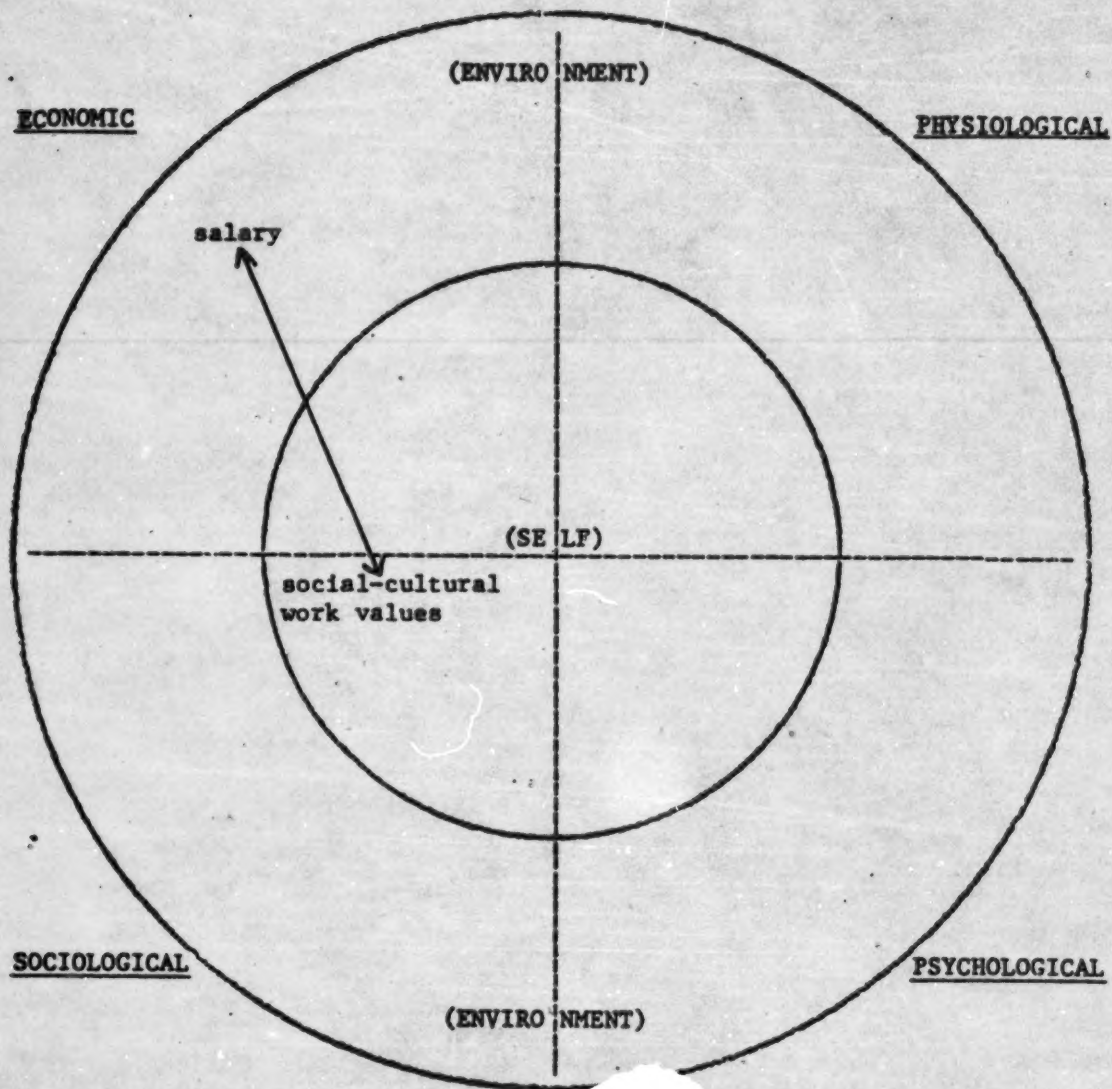


Figure 11. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 9.

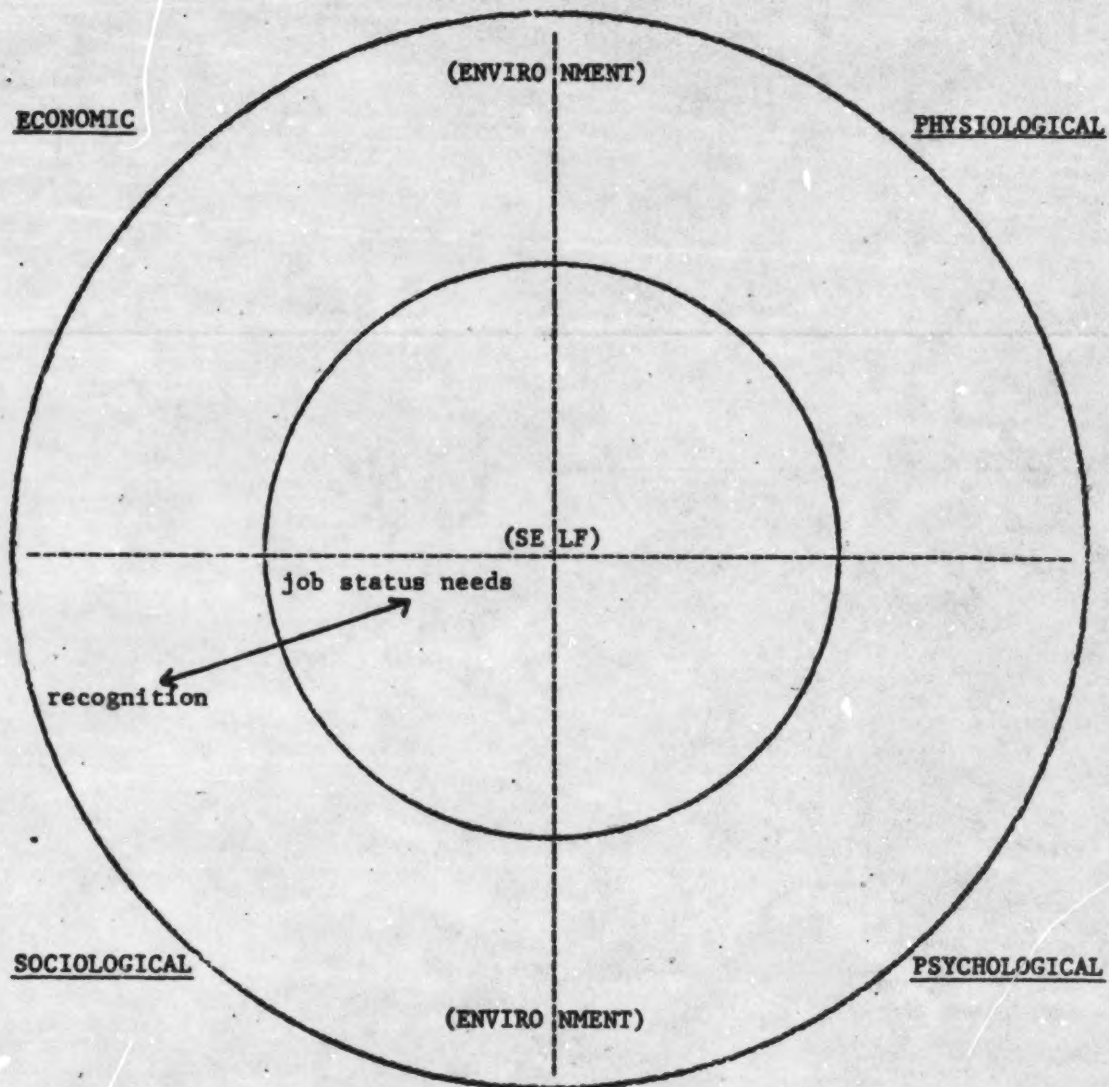


Figure 12. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 10.

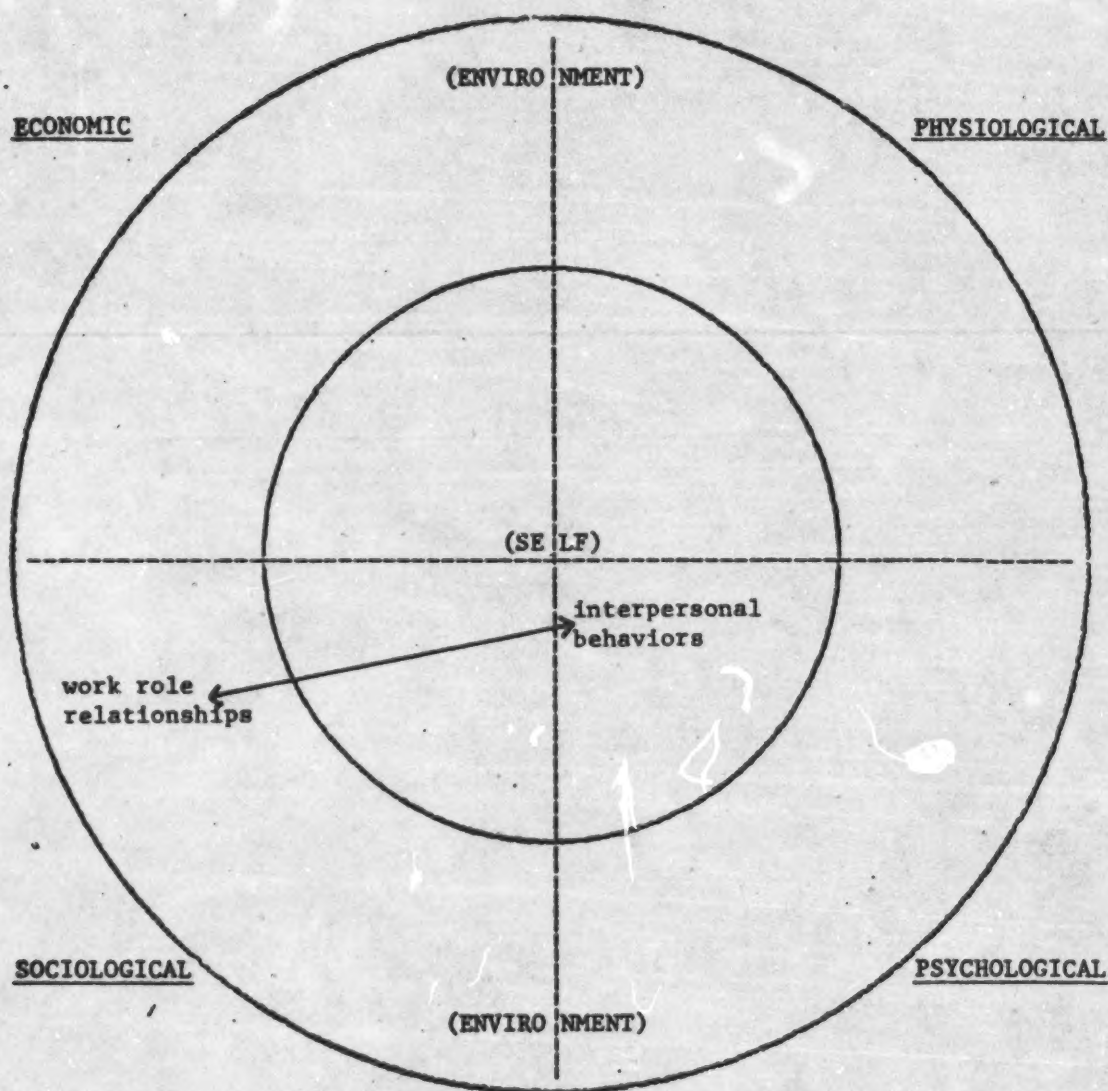


Figure 13. Contradictory self-environmental interactions described in sketch 11.

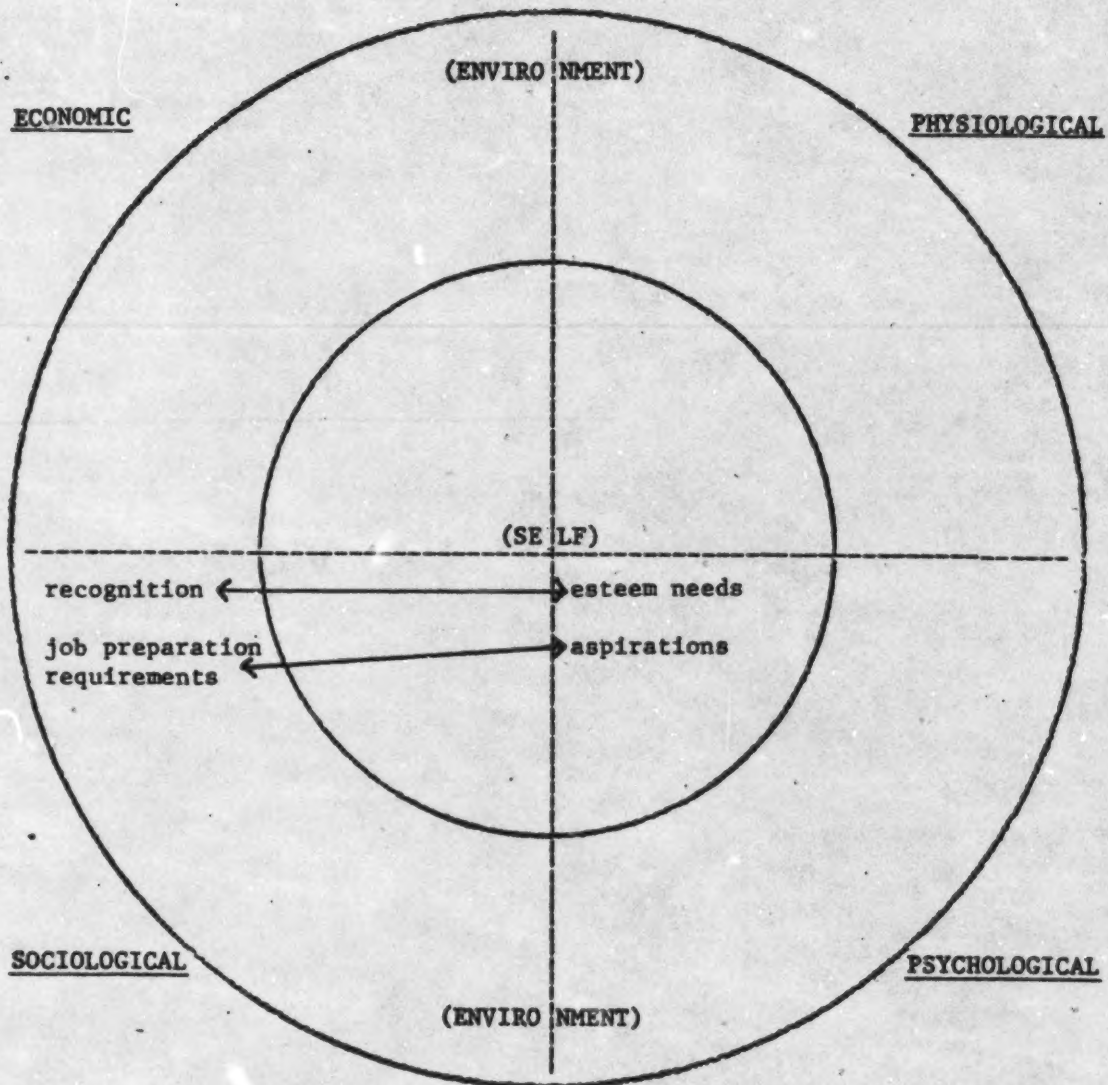


Figure 14. Contradictory self-environmental interaction described in sketch 12.

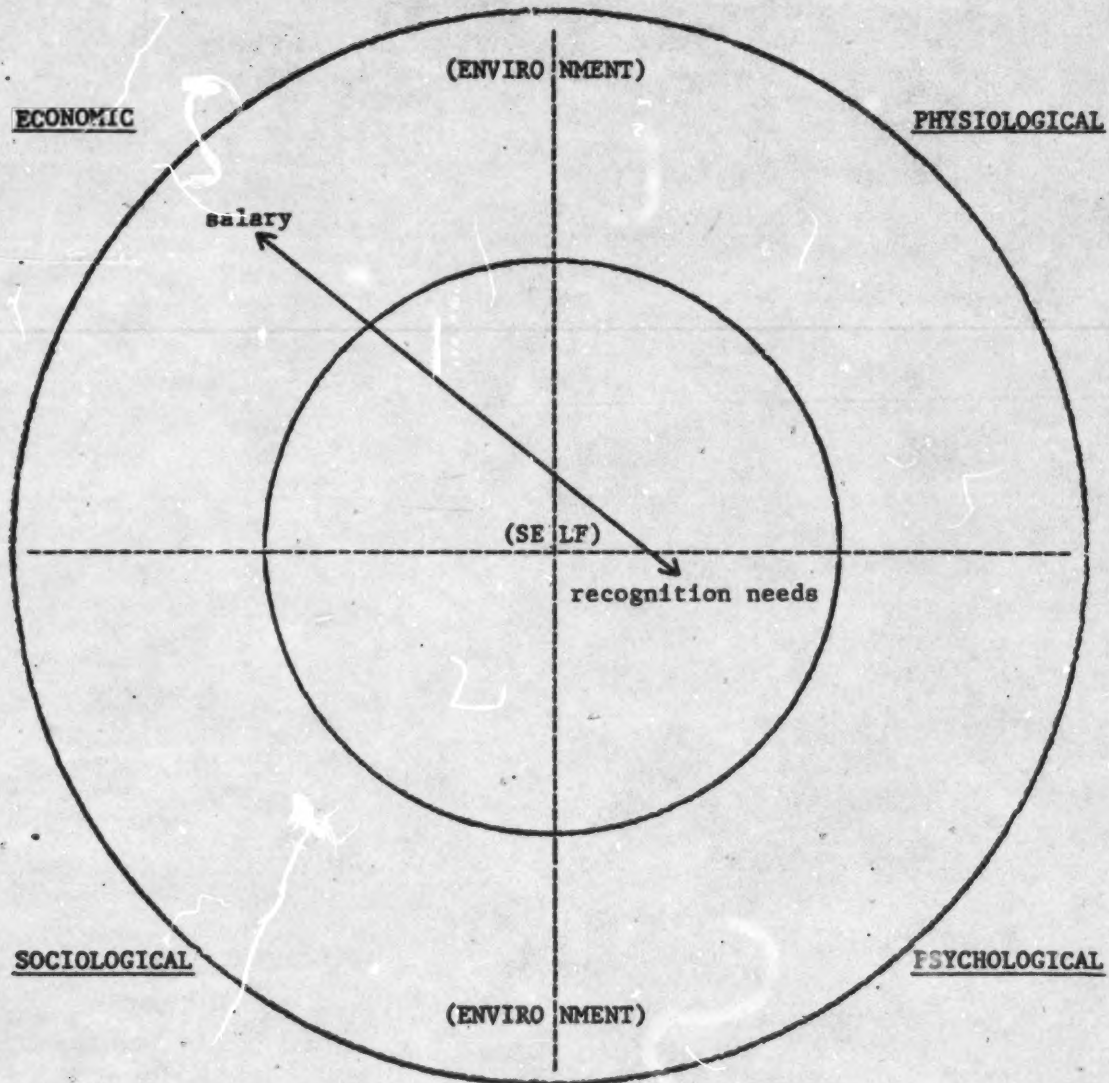
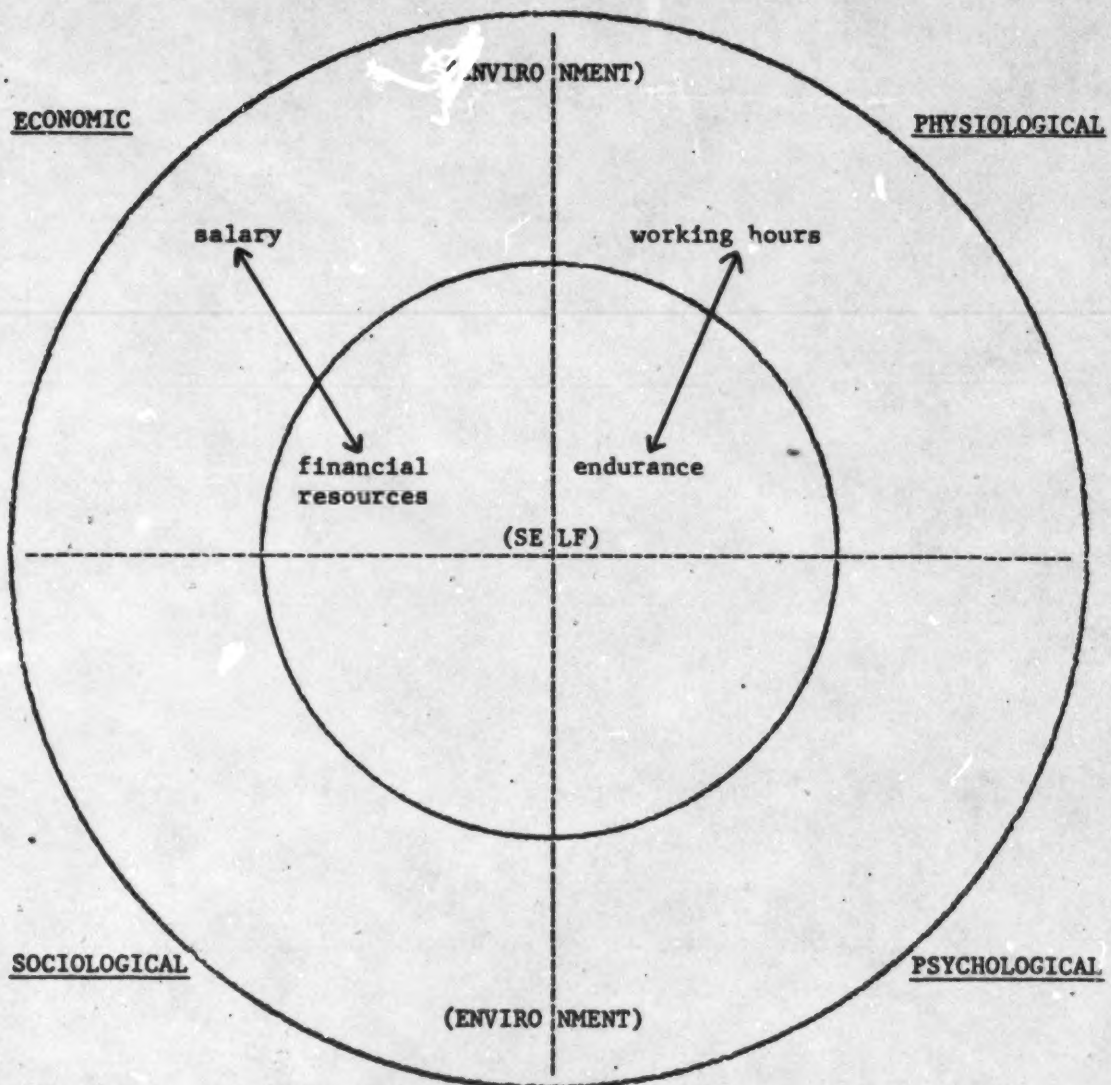


Figure 15. Contradictory self-environmental interactions described in sketch 13.



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